



Suburban Sprawl Squeezes Out Farmers

Wildlife Losing Ground

Scenic Vista Obliterated by Rural Development Project

Floodwaters Strike Again

Subdividing Forest Land Results in Reduced Hunting Opportunities

Headlines in the local paper? No, but these fictitious newspaper headlines are indicative of resource issues facing Wisconsin. Our state's wildlife is facing pressure from our growing human population and the related impacts on the habitat that wildlife needs to survive.

Wisconsin: A Natural!

Wisconsin is a natural! It's an attractive and appealing place to live because it has wonderful natural characteristics: scenic vistas along rural routes, the bluffs of southwestern Wisconsin, the northern forest and its many quiet northwoods lakes, and vast stretches of Great Lake shorelines, just to name a few. Wisconsin is a state filled with wildlife and

wild places. Most of us in Wisconsin value these natural characteristics immensely.

Many Wisconsinites visit our rural and natural areas to enjoy the beauty and serenity found in nature. People want natural recreational opportunities close to home. Many of our citizen's livelihoods or lifestyles are linked to Wisconsin's wildlife or wild places.

People interact with Wisconsin's wildlife and wild places in many ways. Some of our activities—such as farming, forestry, outdoor recreation and tourism based on hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, canoeing, hiking, camping or site-seeing—can be compatible with wildlife and wild places. However, many other land use activities, like the building of new roads, new housing subdivisions, new shopping malls and new industrial parks can have direct and indirect impacts on wildlife. For example, a primary cause of the loss of wildlife is the alteration of native habitats, particularly nesting and breeding habitat. Many Threatened and Endangered plants and animals have declined in Wisconsin as a direct result of the destruction of habitat such as wetlands and grasslands.

Planning for the Future the Smart Way

If you care deeply about wildlife and wild places and are concerned about their future, you have a unique opportunity in these next few years to get involved in land use planning efforts at your local level. You can help wildlife by making sure your community protects or enhances the wild places on which wild animals depend.

What is this unique opportunity? A new law,

commonly referred to as “**Smart Growth**,” requires that all towns, counties, villages, and cities in Wisconsin make all of their land use decisions in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan. These plans must be completed by 2010.

So where do you begin? The first step you can take is to contact your local governmental leaders to find out who is on your Comprehensive Plan Committee. Go to your town board meeting or to your county courthouse. Ask how you can get involved with the planning effort. Volunteer to be on the Comprehensive Planning Committee. There may be committees at various levels (your town and your county). The committee will first need to gather a lot of information on the current conditions in your community, including an inventory of natural resources. Community members will need to decide what they want their community to look like in the next 10, 20 or 50 years. What aspects of the community do they like, what don't they like, and what would they like to change, keep or enhance? The future of your community depends on the decisions you and your neighbors make now.

You need to make your decisions with care. Consider the pros and cons of all proposed options. Your community can choose that any new development is located in places and in ways that minimize the impact on wildlife and wild places—those treasured natural resources of Wisconsin.

When developing your community's Comprehensive Plan, try to maintain and enhance those land uses that are compatible with wildlife and wild places. Farming and forestry can be effective land uses that buffer public land from

intensive human activities. Outdoor recreation and nature tourism can be promoted as land uses that are compatible with protecting wildlife.

By actively participating on your Comprehensive Planning Committee, you can help ensure that your plan protects wildlife habitat over large areas of your community.

Comprehending the Comprehensive

Your community's Comprehensive Plan must address nine key elements including housing, transportation, utilities, agriculture, cultural and natural resources.

The typical process of developing a Comprehensive Plan begins with a number of public meetings to help set a course for the Plan's development. This is usually followed by researching and inventorying your community's existing resources. This inventory will become the basis for future decision-making. With each successive meeting your community's proposals are fleshed out. Finally, your Comprehensive Plan Committee will unveil the Plan at a legally-noticed public hearing. Once your community's Comprehensive Plan is adopted, the course of your community's future land use changes will be set. All future land use decisions must be made in accordance to your plan.

After your plan is completed and formally adopted, your work has only just begun. Your committee must then seek appropriate regulatory (such as zoning code changes) or incentive-based (such as adoption of a Purchase of Development Rights program or tax incentives) tools to implement your plan.



Speak up for Wildlife

Here are some suggested wildlife-friendly points to consider as you develop your community's Comprehensive Plan:

- Strongly advocate that sound, conservation-based land stewardship become the major underlying philosophy upon which all subsequent land use decisions are made. Protect the land and its resources first.
- Identify and maintain a diversity of habitats in your community. Maintain large blocks of habitat whenever possible. You may want to consider keeping these large blocks of land roadless.
- Identify habitat corridors along rivers, bluffs, roads, railroads, powerlines, or other natural linear features and stress the importance of protecting these wildlife travel lanes. Consider limiting development along these corridors.
- Identify all wetlands and seek ways to diligently protect these important wildlife habitats from being filled, drained, ditched or otherwise altered or developed.
- Identify lands adjacent to lakes, rivers and streams. These waterways are extremely important to wildlife. Advocate that these habitats be left wild, not developed.
- Many public properties (wildlife areas, parks, state forests) are becoming ringed with residential or commercial developments. These

tend to be incompatible with the wildlife on the properties and often cause conflicts between the users of the public properties and the owners of the surrounding private land (for example, residents living adjacent to a wildlife area may oppose hunting on the public hunting ground). Your committee may wish to protect current private lands compatible with the public property (farms and forest land).

- Identify key areas that should be dedicated to agriculture or forestry. Consider soils and slopes. These land uses are typically more friendly to wildlife than residential development or industrial parks.
- Encourage the adoption of an ordinance for the practice of residential conservation subdivisions near existing development. These are areas where homes are concentrated in one area of the development and the resultant open space is shared by other homeowners. See the DNR for more information about conservation subdivisions.

Resources & Contacts

Planning for Natural Resources: A guide to preparing the natural resources element of a local comprehensive plan. To be available through WDNR in Fall 2001.

If your community is involved in a comprehensive planning process, the following DNR staff can help you answer questions about incorporating natural resource issues.

Northern Region: Chuck McCullough, Park Falls, (715) 762-4684 ext. 106

Northeast Region: Shelly Schaetz, Green Bay (920) 492-5819

Southeast Region: Mike Thompson, Milwaukee (414) 263-8648

South Central Region: Russ Anderson, Fitchburg, (608) 275-3467.

West Central Region: Tom Lovejoy, Eau Claire, (715) 839-3747.

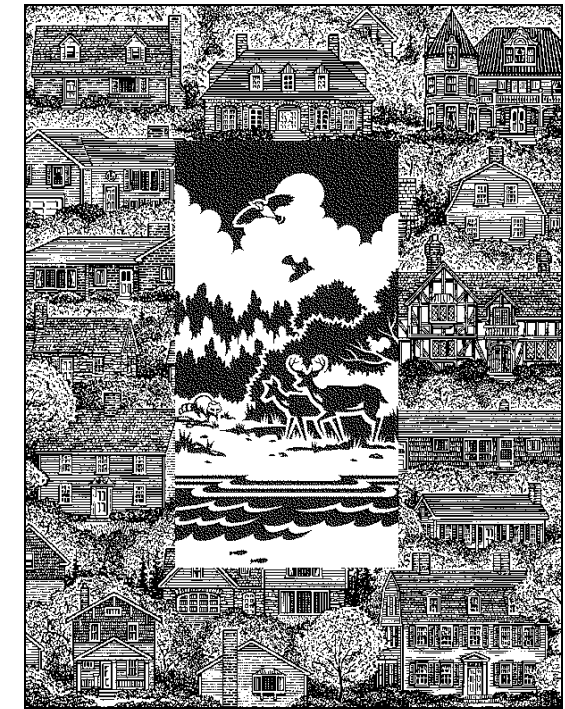
For more information about the Comprehensive Planning law, contact the Department of Administration, (608) 264-6116. Visit the Office of Land Information's website at <http://www.doa.state.wi.us/olis/>

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please call (608) 266-8204 for more information.

Your local UW-Extension office is also a good resource.



PUB-WM-366 2001



Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation

What it means for Wildlife

